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## Consumer's use of information sources by fashion leadership and style of information processing

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*Background.* For fashion consumers, information search precedes any purchase decision. The search may be internal (e.g., retrieving knowledge from memory) and/or external. External information can come from personal (e.g., family) and impersonal (e.g., TV) sources (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2005). Consumers use many sources of information but each consumer finds source(s) of information that work best for him/her. The combination of information sources that works best for an individual may be influenced by style of processing, that is, his/her "preference and propensity to engage in a verbal and/or visual modality of processing" (Childers, Houston, & Heckler, 1985, p. 130). Childers et al. found that style of information processing (SOP), words versus images, correlated with measures of advertising recall and recognition; however, they did not examine other types of information sources. It is important to consider individual traits in research related to consumer information search and processing. One individual trait found to be related to consumer behavior is fashion leadership; this trait might also be related to SOP. *The purpose of this study* was to examine the relationships of fashion leadership and SOP with consumers' frequency of use of information sources. Three hypotheses were examined: H1. Fashion leadership is related to frequency of use of information sources: (a) internal, (b) impersonal external, (c) personal external. H2. SOP-visual is related to frequency of use of information sources: (a) internal, (b) impersonal external, (c) personal external. H3. SOP-verbal is related to frequency of use of information sources: (a) internal, (b) impersonal external, (c) personal external.

*Method.* A survey was conducted using a convenience sample of 351 US college students (171 men; 180 women; M age = 20.79). Childers et al.'s (1985) scale was used to measure preference for style of processing. Frequency of use of sources of information was measured using a scale by Seock and Bailey (2009). Included in the scale are personal external information sources (i.e., mother, father, sisters or other female family members, brothers or other male family members, friends, girlfriend or boyfriend, and salespeople at the store) and impersonal external sources of information (i.e., fashion magazines, non-fashion magazines, catalogues, internet, television ads, celebrities, observed street-wear, and store displays). Use of internal information source (i.e., oneself) was measured by a single item, "How often do you use personal experience as an information source when you make a purchase decision about clothing items?" Hirschman and Adcock's (1978) Measure of Fashion Innovativeness and Opinion Leadership was used to measure fashion leadership. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. MANOVA followed by ANOVA was used to examine the hypotheses.

*Findings.* Reliability of all variables was acceptable. MANOVA was conducted with fashion leadership (leaders, followers), SOP-visual (high, low) and SOP-verbal (high, low) as independent variables and information sources (oneself, personal, impersonal) as dependent variables. All three independent variables resulted in significant results for the dependent variables: fashion leadership,  $F(3, 341) = 18.99, p < .001$ ; SOP-visual,  $F(3, 341) = 6.11, p < .001$ ; and SOP-verbal,  $F(3, 341) = 3.10, p < .027$ . Thus, the hypotheses were tested with ANOVA. Fashion leaders used oneself [ $F(1, 349) = 18.61, p < .001$ ] and impersonal [ $F(1, 349) = 52.52, p < .001$ ] information sources more frequently than fashion followers; use of personal sources was not significantly different. Participants with high SOP-visual used oneself [ $F(1, 349) = 16.87, p < .001$ ] and impersonal [ $F(1, 349) = 11.96, p < .001$ ] information sources more frequently than participants with low SOP-visual; use of personal sources was not significantly different. Participants with low SOP-verbal used oneself as information source more frequently than participants with high SOP-verbal [ $F(1, 349) = 8.23, p < .004$ ]; use of personal or impersonal sources was not significantly different. H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b, and H3a were supported.

*Discussion.* Fashion leaders used their internal resources, that is, experience and knowledge from memory. Because fashion leaders go shopping more often, and are more interested in fashion, they may have built up substantial internal information about apparel products they can subsequently rely on when in need of information. Fashion leaders also frequently used impersonal information sources such as the Internet, observed street-wear, store displays, celebrities, television ads, fashion magazines, catalogs, and non-fashion magazines—they are aware of and pay attention to marketer-dominated information sources. Participants who prefer processing visual information also tend to use internal and impersonal information sources. These consumers may store images of apparel products based on their experiences, knowledge, and new information from impersonal sources. Participants who prefer processing information with fewer words used primarily internal information. Perhaps these consumers depend on their past experiences with particular brands or stores and fulfill their information needs by depending on brand or store loyalty. Interestingly, personal information sources were not related to fashion leadership or SOP-visual or SOP-verbal, indicating that these consumers do not differ in use of family, friends, and salespeople as information sources. Results highlight the importance of internal information source, which originates from previous information gleaned from both personal and impersonal sources.

*Implications.* Most impersonal sources of information are marketer-dominated, meaning that fashion leaders and participants with high SOP-visual rely on apparel companies more than non-marketer dominated personal sources to gather product information. Therefore, the results suggest that apparel companies use visually interesting information (e.g., VOD) in promotion and communication. In this way, the purposes of information will be delivered to these fashion consumers more efficiently and effectively.

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